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ABSTRACT

This report is drawn from an ethnographic study still in progress of the principalship of a comprehensive public senior high school in a suburban community. Following a discussion of the paucity of research offering good descriptions of what principals actually do as opposed to what they should do, the study methodology is outlined, including criteria for school and principal selection and procedures for data collection and data analysis. Next, in the section on the study's findings, the school where the study is being conducted and the dominant concerns of the principal are described. After characterizing the school and its principal as seen by the community generally, a description of the principal's daily activities, based on extensive observation, are offered. The next two sections discuss how the principal ensures a high level of control and coordination both directly and indirectly, using self-created mechanisms of control together with other control mechanisms dictated by outside authorities. Concluding with a discussion of contemporary organizational theory, the paper argues that the senior high school in question is not well described as either anarchic or "loosely coupled," but rather should be seen as a complex heirarchical system. (JBM)

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# American High School: Characteristics of Organization and Culture and Their Impact on the Exercise of Leadership by the Principal

by

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What follows is a preliminary report of work in progress. The work is an ethnographic study of the principalship of a senior high school. The full year of data-gathering for this study is now drawing to a close. Therefore, as I have explained more fully elsewhere (Owens, 1982), I am now engaged in theme analysis - while there is still opportunity to (1) check and corroborate understandings with informants in the school and (2) carry out more selective observations (Spradley, 1980, pp. 33-34) focused on the particular issue discussed in this paper: organizational coordination and control.

Background. This report is drawn from an inquiry into the work behavior of the principal of that genus of school known in America as the comprehensive public senior high school, which is the most common type of high school in the country (Byrne, Hines, and McCleary, 1978, p. 34; Boyer, 1984, p. 233). The inquiry was undertaken in the belief that the organizational behavior of principals is unarguably an important source of knowledge to inform policy development and strategies for school improvement interventions.

While the role of the principal may be conceptualized in many ways, a relatively few concepts dominate existing reported research. Thus, we find studies of the principal as leader; instructional supervisor; decision maker; and so on. Clearly, the most prevalent concept reflected in the research literature is that of the principal as leader. Many studies have been designed to utilize scores obtained through the use of such instruments as the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (Halpin and Winer, 1957), the Executive Professional Leadership Scale (Gross and

Herriott, 1965), the Least-Preferred Co-Worker Scale (Fiedler, 1967), or any of a number of other scales intended to measure leadership style.

"In short," Greenfield (1982) observes, "most studies appear to be guided by idealized conceptions of what principals should be like rather than conceptions grounded in observation of actual behavior on the job. While there has been an increase in recent years in the number of basic descriptive studies of school principals at work, the leadership image continues to influence the questions studied by researchers . . . [Thus] while 'leadership' may be what we hope to see reflected in the behavior of school principals, over-emphasizing this dimension of the role systematically obscures many other enduring and critical dimensions of what it is that principals do on the job, and tends to detract attention from a wide range of organizational and environmental factors influencing efforts by the principal to work effectively within the school enterprise" (pp. 1-2).

Some recent studies have been reported that describe what principals actually do, rather than to confirm a priori theoretical constructs, such as leadership. These are, of course, observational studies which seek to illuminate the job behavior of school principals in the confusion and ambiguity of the work environment. They include a study of the discretionary behavior of urban school principals (Crowson and Porter-Gehrie, 1980), discretionary decision-making behavior of Chicago school principals (Morris, Crowson, Hurwitz, and Porter-Gehrie, 1981), the managerial behavior of high school principals (Martin and Willower, 1981), and Wolcott's (1973a) now-classic study of an elementary school principal. The studies in this group are all basic descriptive studies that seek to identify variables and relationships that may lead to more powerful theoretical concepts

about the principalship than have been thus far developed. What seemed noteworthy, however, was the fact that while urban schools and elementary schools were represented in the literature there was scant research in the environment of the ubiquitous suburban senior high school. Such a school was the focus for this inquiry.

Purpose and Rationale. The purpose of the research was to provide better understanding of the work behavior of the principal of a senior high school in a suburban community. Seeking to be more than merely descriptive in the sense of mindlessly chronicling the activities of a school principal at work, data were sought which, upon analysis, may provide better understanding of the behavior under study: not only what do people do, but why do they do these things? How do they view their world, and why do they see it so? How do they spend their time at work? How do they interpret and feel about their experiences? What do they see as important and inimportant? These are some of the kinds of questions the study will seek to answer when the final report is written.

## Method

Having discussed the dificulties in getting good descriptions of principal behavior because of ambiguities inherent in the context of the principalship, Rowan, Dwyer, and Bossert (1982) point out that "One way around the problem of descriptive ambiguity is to employ qualitative methodologies that generate thick descriptions of . . . behaviors" (p. 6). "Thick description" conveys very much the sense of the web of interrelated contextual factors in which the behavior under study is embedded. Thick

description is more than mere information or descriptive data: at its best it conveys a literal description that figuratively transports the reader into the situation with a sense of insight, understanding, and illumination not only of the facts or events in the case, but also the texture, the quality, and the power of the context as the participants in the situation experience it.

Therefore, in designing the research a qualitative methodology was required that would (1) yield observational data from which (2) thick description could be derived. The methodological considerations undergirding the present research being reported here have been described elsewhere (Owens, 1982). Briefly, however, the method of choice was ethnography, as used by Wolcott (1973a) in his study of an elementary school principal.

Since the design of the study closely follows that of Wolcott, it is an adaptive replication of that study. A major adaptation is that, whereas Wolcott studied the principal in an elementary school, the present research focused on the principal of a public comprehensive senior high school in a suburban community.

Selection of School and Principal. The procedures for selecting of the school and the principal to be studied closely followed those described by Wolcott (1973a, Ch. 1). That is, a reputational procedure was used, in this case involving a panel of school superintendents and high school principals, to identify a pool of principals who met the basic criteria for selection. Thereupon, the investigator narrowed the field by interviewing those identified; some, of course, declined for various reasons and others were dropped from consideration for various reasons. The final selection was made after more intensive interviewing and, in some cases, discussion with the superintendent of schools in the district.

Basic criteria for selection were:

1. The principal must be known to his peers as an effective, successful high school principal.

2. The principal must be a full-time supervising principal (not a teaching principal).

3. The school must be an accredited public comprehensive senior high school (not, for examples, a junior high school, or an alternative school, a magnet school or a specialized high school) enrolling approximately 1,200 to 2,000 average daily membership in a suburban community. Following Bureau of Census guidelines, "suburban" was defined as a school in a suburban area of 25,000 to 50,000 inhabitants outside of a standard metropolitan area.

4. At the outset of the study the principal must be experienced (at least three years as principal of that school) and well established as principal of the school.

5. The principal must be in charge of one unit (no annexes).

6. The principal must be male, as are 93% of high school principals in the United States (Boyer, 1983, p. 220).

7. The school must enroll a substantial population of ethnic minority students.

8. The suburban community in which the school is located must be predominantly working class or middle class; that is, neither an affluent nor a poor community.

9. The principal must not be engaged in a graduate program of studies at Indiana University.

10. The principal must evidence sufficient integrity and self-

confidence to commit himself to such an undertaking and carry it through to its conclusion.

Data Collection. I entered the selected school as a full-time observer in August, 1983; this coincided with the principal's return to work after his annual summer vacation and marked the period of intense preparation prior to the opening of school for the new school year. I was in the school regularly throughout the fall term, until the recess for the Christmas/Chanukah holiday season. During the spring term I returned to the school for one or two days per month [Note: this is the schedule being maintained at this writing, and it is expected to be maintained throughout the remainder of the year until school closes in June, 1984].

The procedures for data collection conformed to those described by Wolcott (1970; 1973a; 1973b; 1982). Thus, the strategy and techniques employed were those widely used in ethnography. A triad mode of data collection (Van Maanen, Dabbs, and Faulkner, 1982, Ch. 2) was used involving observation, interviewing, and study of archival material. The daily schedule of observation normally began at 7:10 a.m., which was the usual time for the principal to arrive at work, and extended throughout the principal's workday (occasionally extending into the evening). The principal was observed at work in virtually every situation, in and out of his office, with very few exceptions being made for interviews thought to be too sensitive to have a third part present. Other informants were also interviewed and, to a lesser extent, observed at work. One-hundred-seven archival documents were also collected and examined.

Fieldnotes were hand-written in notebooks. At the end of each day notes were reviewed, edited, expanded, and clarified while the day was still freshly in mind. At that time, questions to be investigated were noted, plans for follow-up (such as triangulation, member checks, and other confirmatory procedures) made, and tentative interpretations entered. Weekly, fragments of narrative were drafted from the notes on a word processor. The latter device made it relatively very easy to prepare drafts quickly while experience was still fresh, and also easy to revise in the light of deepening understandings and insights that developed as the data-gathering process proceeded over time.

Data Analysis. Analysis of the data included the identification of recurrent themes which are useful in acquiring a holistic view of the organizational culture of the senior high school. As used here, a theme is "a postulate or position, declared or implied . . . usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society (Opler, 1945, p. 198). Themes are important elements in the patterns that comprise the culture of the social group (Spradley, 1980, p. 141). In explicit form they are detectable through expressions of "things that everybody knows," "common sense", and well-accepted aphorisms that convey conventional wisdom in the culture. In tacit form - perhaps more frequently encountered - they are evidenced by behavior: decisions routinely taken, customs, enactment of everyday behavior.

The principal technique used to identify themes in this study was for the investigator to immerse himself in the high school under study. "Immersion," Spradley points out, "is the time-honored strategy used by most ethnographers. By cutting oneself off from other interests and

concerns, by listening to informants hours on end, by participating in the cultural scene and by allowing one's mental life to be taken over by the new culture, themes often emerge" (p. 145). However, it is necessary for the investigator to withdraw briefly from time to time during this process to generate insights into the themes and the culture; to make them explicit, and integrate them into an organized, coherent set of propositions that may be tested and verified upon returning to the research site (D'Andrade, 1976, p. 179).

One theme arising from the data in this study will be presented and discussed in this paper: organizational control and coordination.

## Findings

The North Durham Senior High School (as it shall be called here) enrolls 1,719 students in grades 9 through 12. It has a staff of 119 certificated teaching personnel (that is, 119 persons represented by the local teachers union). An even 100 of those persons are classroom teachers, the others being counselors of various sorts, a psychologist, a nurse, a social worker, librarians, and so on. The administrative staff consists of the principal and three assistant principals, who are represented by their local union of administrators and supervisors. Ten of the classroom teachers have been designated as department chairpersons, for which they receive extra compensation and are allowed 2 or 3 periods per day to carry out functions of that office. Eighteen full-time and 3 part-time custodians, under the direction of a head custodian, work in shifts around the clock to clean and maintain the building. A kitchen crew, reduced now to 7 women, operates the biggest food service for miles around.

There is nothing very distinctive about North Durham Senior High School: it is one of some 15,000 senior high schools in the country (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982, p. 16). While it is larger than the average such school in the nation, which would enroll about 750 students (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, p. 16), it is the size and kind of high school that most American students attend (Boyer, p. 233). The North Durham School District counted 26,274 residents in the 1980 census who sent their nearly 5,000 children to one of 5 elementary schools that the district maintains, the junior high school, or the senior high school. The community proudly describes itself as blue collar or middle class: 18% of the residents described their occupations as semiskilled, 32% managerial, and 5% professional. The families of 100 students are welfare recipients and 150 students in the senior high school are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Anyone who goes to the school at 7:10 in the morning to watch the students pouring off of the big yellow buses as they roll into the semicircular driveway while a steady stream of student's cars rapidly fills the parking lot and disgorges yet more students must wonder: how in the world do they keep all of these kids under control? And, do they?

In fact, concerns about control and coordination dominate the thinking of John Quinlan, the school's principal. But - unlike some members of the district's school board - John is not only concerned about controlling the behavior of students; he devotes considerable time and attention to curriculum and instruction - including scope and sequence of course offerings, scheduling, improving the quality of instruction, and the development of innovative programs of instruction.

Images of the School and its Principal. Individuals at all levels in the school district (school board and district office, school administration, and teachers in the school) share a clear and remarkably congruent understanding of the formal organization of North Durham Senior High School. Their language and concepts are drawn straight from the bureaucratic tradition: they describe the hierarchy of authority, the legitimacy of office, line and staff relationships, supervision of the lower ranks by the next rank above, and so on. To a person, they could not think of any other way of organizing although they understood that the patterns of organization (based on these concepts) could be altered.

In the early stages of forging our agreement to do this participant observation study, John had said to me, "Remember, when my car rolls into that driveway at 7:10 each morning I'm 'on' as the principal here. Every thing I do and say - every move I make - is purposeful as principal of this school; intended to accomplish something that I nave planned to work on that day." With that, he had stipulated that - while it would be all right to "shadow" him (as he put it) - I must not distract him with questions that would interfere with his performance in role: questions and explanations of observations could be handled after school, over coffee in the privacy of his office where he could relax and momentarily step out of the role of principal as he saw it and into the role of professional colleague and peer.

"John Quinlan is the best organized guy that I've ever met," Morris Feinson, the district's assistant superintendent for instruction, had told me. "He plans each day meticulously, he makes each minute count, and he gets more work done than any man I know."

"Oh, Quinlan is a leader," Sarah Baldwin, a special education teacher,

had observed enthusiastically. "He knows what he wants to accomplish; he sets goals, and - by God - he knows how to make those goals come out. He doesn't just stand around: this guy gets things done!"

At 53, standing an erect 6'4", as lean as when he was a lineman for Boston College in its heyday as a power in the football world, John Quinlan might have been sent from Central Casting when the call went out for someone to play "leader." His once-blond hair is mostly grey now, still unruly but - cut short yet full - determinedly groomed to a neat, conservative appearance. His pale grey eyes, well-practiced over the years to maintain maximum contact with others, often seem to be unwavering and piercing. He dresses meticulously in suits or jackets of undistinguished style with button-down shirts, exuding the "look" of a small-town Rotarian - which he is.

John Quinlan does not walk, as teachers in the school do: he strides, moving deliberately - never in haste - and carefully, always erect and ever alert. His constant companion in his frequent forays about the school is a clipboard, which holds a number of lists and charts: teacher attendance, student attendance, teacher assignments, assignments to duty stations, and so forth. He seems to understand that he is an imposing figure, both in terms of his personal attributes and the status of office; as he moves about through the corridors and classrooms of the school he maintains a constant effort to greet individuals, exchange civilities, be available for chance encounter that anyone - student or adult - might seek. He routinely surprises both students and teachers by revealing detailed knowledge of their schedules, their backgrounds, and even their families. He addresses their interests: with the sports "nuts" he animatedly discusses the latest

scores and forecasts; to another teacher he describes a successful weekend foray for antiques; another wants to give Quinlan advice as to which college his athletic youngest daughter should attend. Interspersed with these personal asides, a great deal of business is done: this one needs chairs in his classroom, and where are they? Another alerts him to her concern about a practice teacher sent down from a university for the semester. Another wants him to "straighten out" the Guidance Department in its alleged mishandling of certain student assignments to class. And so on and on, with a quick decision here, a careful notation there, setting a date for a conference with another. His face is composed, yet not stern, suggesting an openness and receptivity, and readily shifts to a warm smile or stern seriousness with mercurial speed as occasion requires.

His voice is strong, yet soft and carefully modulated with a range of tone and inflection that can, in turn, be encouraging and reassuring, cooly polite and civil, or authoritative and demanding, depending upon the nature of the encounter. As he tours the school I am impressed by two things. One is that he knows how to work a crowd. The other is that he reminds me for all the world of the pictures that we have all seen of churchmen touring among their flocks; the dignity of bearing combined with a beaming composure creates an almost numinous sense of leadership.

In his office, Quinlan sits - nearly always in his leather swivel-chair behind an imposing mahogany desk bereft of papers or clutter of any kind - erect, alert, never slouching or fidgeting. He leaves no doubt as to who is in charge; intolerant of rambling discussions, he takes the lead in developing an orderly agenda for each encounter and insists on settling one item at a time. If he perceives that a certain topic can only be dis-

cussed, but not lead to an action decision, he does his best to delete it from the agenda.

Mechanisms of Control and Coordination. Principal Quinlan has developed a remarkably functional organization in his high school to assure a high level of control and coordination. The larger organizational environment - the school district - also imposes mechanisms of control and coordination of its own, through Quinlan's office. A few examples are illustrative.

The processes of budget-building and administration provide a powerful mechanism through which the school board, the superintendent of schools and other central office officials, and the principal exercise close detailed supervision and control of a significant portion of the work of teachers. For instance, approval for the adoption of a new textbook title requires the execution of a form that must be reviewed, approved, and signed by nine officials as it wends its way up the hierarchy and, finally - if the request survives the process - is acted on by the board of education. Further, the board maintains in the board meeting room a library of every textbook currently used in the school.

The principal of the school is accountable to the Assistant Superintendent for instruction, to whom he is required to provide a steady flow of reports - both written and oral - concerning instructional and curricular programs in the school. Much of the information in those reports emanates, of course, from reports that the principal obtains from department chairpeople who, in turn, obtain data and information from teachers.

Teachers are required to prepare written plans for their classes on prescribed forms. These are submitted each Friday to the chairpeople for

critical review and approval signature. In addition, the school principal and the assistant principals review systematically-selected samples of teacher plans each week. All plans are returned to teachers prior to the start of classes on Monday mornings so that instruction is carried out only from officially-approved plans.

Scheduling is a powerful and readily visible management technique for exercising managerial control and coordination. An overriding influence on behavior is the schedule of classes. This device brings together students, space and facilities, and instructors in combinations thought to be appropriate. This schedule has been so internalized by participants that the outsider must learn a new way to tell time: people will say, "I'll see you third period" (not 9:14); or, in recounting an event during the day, "It happened late in fifth period." The precision and power of the schedule to control the behavior of nearly 2,000 inhabitants of the school is a dominant characteristic of the school and an extraordinary source of managerial power that the principal accepted usually as a "given".

The schedule of classes is supplemented by numerous related schedules: lunch schedules, auditorium schedules, duty schedules for teachers, and schedules for students to interact with counselors are examples. Mastering the complexities and nuances of scheduling is among the premium skills required of administrators in the senior high school. This was underscored by the crowding of some 100 freshmen into the guidance office on the opening day of school: somehow, they had not been assigned class schedules. And it was again underscored a few days later, when it came to light that the students enrolled in the science classes had not been scheduled for their laboratory sections.

An elaborate two-part system of "duty stations" is anoter administrative device for coordination and control. One element is a plan whereby 38 teachers are scheduled to take up positions in and around the building from 7:25 A.M. to 7:40 A.M. so as to supervise the unloading of buses and cars and the subsequent movement of the students to their 51 "home rooms". The home room period lasts only six minutes, giving duty teachers time to get to their classrooms while attendance is being taken and the students are settled down to start the day's routine.

With the start of the first period, at 7:40 A.M., the second element of the administrative plan comes into play: the scheduling of teachers to 54 duty stations throughout the school. The movement of students through the halls during class periods is sharply limited and controlled by the teachers on duty. Passes are issued for legitimate reasons under a written policy; they are checked upon passing a duty station and signed by a qualified staff member to validate the pass for the return trip.

Absence and tardiness of students is meticulously monitored, not only from day to day but period by period throughout the day, by two assistant principals assisted by teachers (whose time equals that of a full-time teacher). Telephone calls are promptly made to parents of students who are in violation of attendance policies. An attendance officer makes home visits in chronic or difficult cases. Punishment for violation of the attendance and class-cutting regulations is swift and sure, accounting for most of the students remanded to in-school suspension (which is supervised by a full-time teacher and clerk).

The school's commitment to these coordination and control activities is substantial. Personnel costs for compensation and benefits for super-

vision of instruction and other coordination and control activities in this school run in excess of $800,000 per year.

Surrogates for Formal Bureaucratic Control. I have been describing a few examples of the many direct forms of control exerted by the organization over the behavior of teachers and students in the North Durham Senior High School; there are, however, many indirect means that are also powerful in exerting control and coordination. These often take the form of rules, procedures, regulations, and restriction of resource allocations that are closely related to the requirements of work activities in the school. They also include an array of controls that largely emanate from the extra-organizational environment and appear to be related to the expectations and needs of these environments, rather than the work activities in the school.

Among the direct means for control and coordination, for example, is the formal curriculum; this includes documents that establish scope and sequence policies and practices, course outlines, promotion and graduation requirements, and all of the various prerequisites for eligibility to take a course. Another example is the array of regulations - originating in the state education department, the Federal bureaucracy, and the local teachers union - covering a multitude of topics ranging from class sizes to the length of the school day, from procedures for selecting textbooks to criteria for assigning students to classes, from acceptable procedures for controlling students to establishing limits on access that the school district has to its own property (student lockers).

There is no question that the public school enterprise in America is among the most decentralized in the world and it is commonplace for writers on the organization of schools to contrast the centralized bureaucratic

inspectorial systems of some other nations with the more decentralized American approach. The obvious conclusion is that schools of other nations tend to exercise closer coordination and control because they are more closely coupled whereas the more decoupled arrangement in this country permits (or encourages) avoidance of coordinative and control measures. That seemed rather problematic after observing work activity in North Durham Senior High School: there was considerable evidence of powerful indirect forces working as a surrogate for traditional formal bureaucratic approaches.

For example, the school is accredited by the Middle States Association. For over a year prior to the period of observation, the faculty of the school had worked to prepare for a site visit that was held during the period of observation. This had entailed, first, study of the detailed standards and criteria of the Middle States Association. Then, an examination of previous evaluations and resultant recommendations. Third, the preparation of a comprehensive document by which the school faculty assessed their own school. Fourth, the site-visit team of 30 professionals drawn from universities, school systems, and other educational agencies (including non-public schools) devoted three days to a visit to the school during which time they validated the written self-study by interviewing, observing, and reviewing the files. In time, the report of the site visit team will be reviewed at higher levels of authority within the Middle States Association and an evaluation, with comments and recommendations, will be provided to the school. At that point, the cycle of ongoing evaluation will continue as the faculty review and assess the evaluation, develop plans in response and put them into action, and move toward other systematic steps in the Middle States evaluation process, which is continuous for member schools.

There were numerous other powerful indirect influences on organizational behavior in North Durham Senior High School. Among them were relatively standardized teacher training, the norms of professional societies in which many of the teachers were active, and limited variety of textbooks in the national market that establish widely-held expectations. Standardized examinations, both nationally-used commercial ones and those mandated by the state were very important in planning and evaluation activities of the faculty. In addition, both teachers and administrators devoted time and energy to keeping well-informed as to the practices being used in neighboring and nearby school districts. It was accepted practice for both teachers and administrators to be given time to go to nearby districts from time to time to obtain information about new practices being used in them and it was commonplace for the faculty to assess the worth of their efforts in comparison with what other districts were doing.

## Conclusions

1. The exercise of organizational coordination and control was a major characteristic of the senior high school's organizational culture.

2. Mechanisms for coordination and control may be classified as follows.

I. Source of the exercise of coordination and control.

   A. Internal to the organizational system.

   B. External to the organizational system.

II. Characteristics of the mechanism.

   A. Direct.

   B. Indirect.

3. Organizational participants in the senior high school conceptualized organization in traditional (bureaucratic) terms such as hierarchy of authority, legitimancy of office, and supervision of lower ranks by the next rank above. Organizational norms, therefore, supported the expectation that the organization "ought" to strive to be rational, logical, and systematic.

4. Significant deviations from this normative expectation were explained as aberrations attributable to such causes as political expedience in the governance system or the idiosyncratic failings of key individuals.

5. A powerful motivation for creating some visible coordination and control mechanisms was to satisfy the expectations of external audiences - such as the political constituents of school board members and the stakeholders in the Middle States Association - that such mechanisms were, in fact, in place and working effectively.

6. The North Durham Senior High School is not adequately described as either a bureaucracy or as a loosely coupled system. It is a complex organizational system making functional use of both concepts. The culture of the school, however, supports rationality as a desirable state.

## Discussion

I had entered North Durham Senior High School to engage in a prolonged period of immersion, seeking to discover patterns in the culture of the place that might lead to new insights concerning the task of managing the enterprise. While the data gathering still continues at this writing, the processes of theme analysis has begun: thus, partial and preliminary understandings are being formed which can still be checked and corroborated

by further observations in the school. In this paper, I have shared one set of understandings about the school that is emerging from the data. Those understandings have to do with issues of coordination and control in the school.

Contemporary organizational theory, as it relates to the American public high school, is a field of ferment marked more by ambiguity and confusion than the existence of a well-accepted paradigm to guide either inquiry or practice. Whereas, in the 1960s the classical rationalistic paradigm usually associated with Weber (Parsons, 1947) was largely supplanted by systems theory (Katz and Kahn, 1966), the latter was challenged and modified by the emerging popularity of newer perspectives (chiefly the concept of loose coupling) in the 1970s (Glassman, 1973; March and Olsen, 1976; Weick, 1976; Meyer and Rowan, 1978). As a result, the literature on organizational characteristics of high schools currently abounds with metaphors and assumptions drawn from a rich and very mixed inheritance from the past. In these circumstances it seems likely that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift, as Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979) suggest: a fundamental shift in basic beliefs about the nature of things and the human condition that is pervading all fields of science and human endeavor. If their analysis is correct, the newly-emerging paradigm forecasts major changes in our understanding of human organizations and how to manage them that are only now beginning to be recognizeable.

This state of affairs is relevant to understanding the work behavior of high school principals inasmuch as the organizational realities in which the principal works constitute the setting in which his or her behavior is

embedded (Barker, 1968); hence, our understanding of the behavior of high school principals at work is dynamically linked to our understanding of the organizational ecology in which the work occurs. As a part of a larger study of the work behavior of a high school principal, therefore, it became necessary to examine and develop an understanding of the high school as an organization. The existing literature was not as helpful in doing this as had been hoped; this was partly due to the obvious lack of a clear theoretical paradigm that is generally accepted as an explanation for American senior high schools, as has been described. It was also partly due to the sparsity of literature directly focused on the senior high school as a phenotype, as distinguished from the literature that treats schools in general as genotypes.

Contemporary theorizing on the organizational characteristics of schools tends to be hyperbolic, proffering surprisingly simple imagery through the use of metaphors. An obviously popular theme running through the recent literature is that our choices of concepts to aid us in organizational analysis of schools lie, essentially, in accepting either the rational, mechanistic views of traditional Weberian bureaucracy or the more contemporary newer perspectives which posit that schools are best understood, for examples, as organized anarchies or loosely coupled systems. Repetition of this basic theme has led to a reification of the newer perspectives, themselves, and an analytic distinction between the bureaucratic perspective and the newer perspectives.

A notable example is Weick's (1982) insistence that "schools are <u>not</u> [his emphasis] like other organizations" (p. 673) but are, as he explains, best understood as loosely coupled systems. This assertion is remarkable

for a number of reasons. One is the claim that schools are distinctively unique from all other organizations in the universe. No less remarkable is the assumed organizational isomorphism of the various types and kinds of schooling organizations (e.g., elementary school, junior high schools, senior high schools, alternative high schools, etc.). When those who manage schools are unaware of the singularly unique characteristics of the organization called "school", Weick informs us, "effectiveness declines, people become confused, and work doesn't get done" (p. 673).

Firestone and Herriott (1982) - as a second example - find that contemporary research literature in educational administration essentially presents two organizational "images" from which to select in understanding schools as organizations. They are, on the one hand, "the rational bureaucracy" (p. 41) and, on the other hand, "the anarchy (p. 42)."

This description of the state of the literature may be startling to those who note the absence of other "images", such as presented by Argyris, Likert, and McGregor whose post-Weberian work is well-recognized in the literatures of other organizational fields as having been seminal in modifying what is now clearly outdated classical thought. However, Herriott and Firestone raise a compelling possibility in thinking about the organizational characteristics of schools: that is, that those who inhabit high schools and those who inhabit elementary schools seem to describe their organizations differentially in terms of the "imagery" of the anarchic and bureaucratic metaphors. By inference, they raise the possibility that high schools, as "social entities" (not social systems anymore), are organizationally different from elementary schools. Such possibilities are hardly novel (or even speculative) to long-time observers with first-hand

knowledge of schools. Firestone and Herriott, however, correctly conclude that understanding these differences may raise issues of some significance for those who seek to provide guidance for policy decisions and action in improving the performance of these educative organizations.

Meyer (1978) and Meyer, Scott, Cole, and Intili (1978) - drawing on survey research of elementary schools in the San Francisco area - have produced an elegant analysis supporting the contention that schools characteristically have loosely-coupled coordination and control mechanisms and avoid close monitoring of instruction. This analysis does not fit the empirical data that I am working with. In part, this may be explained by the tendency in previous research to emphasize direct mechanisms such as the school principal's formal observation of instruction in the classroom. In North Durham Senior High School, on the other hand, strong cultural norms and a plethora of indirect means of coordination and control supplemented and supported the more direct boss-to-worker relationship that some tend to associate with Weberian concepts of bureaucracy.

At this point, I intend to return to the school to check the following speculations more carefully:

1. In terms of coordination and control, North Durham Senior High School is not well described as either being an anarchy or loosely coupled. It is better described as a complex hierarchical system that is imperfectly organized, striving for rationality and order, evidencing couplings of varying looseness or tightness.

2. It is an error to assume that the social structure of North Durham Senior High School is an objective set of facts with independent existence. The social structure of the school is better understood to be the social accomplishments of the participants.

3. Senior high schools are remarkably different, in terms of organizational characteristics, from elementary schools. We should be cautious in referring to "schools" as organizational genotypes.

4. Though the term, loose coupling, has achieved iconic status in the literature it has failed to acquire sufficient precision to be useful - except in the broadest conceptual sense - in comparative organizational analysis. Some measures and criteria to define the concept are required if we are to continue to find it useful.

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